

# "He That Is Without Sin"

Mary Magdalene Immortalized As a Feminine "Third Floor Back" In New Play of Modern Social Conditions.

BY ROBERT H. McLAUGHLIN.

**T**HE ETERNAL MAGDALENE is a statement of fact. I have tried to write, tersely and simply, into the three acts of my play, a bit of history. The mystic element threading the plot was suggested by the charity which beautifies an ancient story of the social evil; the story of Christ and the Magdalene.

My play is not a preachment; not propaganda, though I have tried to keep far away from the flippant or irrelevant. I hope the impression it leaves will be unbiased—excepting, perhaps, by the thought, so potent, and so little heeded, "He that is without sin . . . let him first cast a stone."

The plot is built upon the problem that some time or other rises up to trouble most cities. It's the problem of the skeleton in the municipal closet; whether it is advisable to allow it to remain in the closet under police lock and key as advised by rationalists, so called; or whether a precautionary cleaning out of the secret place and scattering of bones, to dry or fester about various corners where people live, is likely to impose the minimum of harm upon the morals of the community, as per the counsel of reformers. That the searching light of various viewpoints should be thrown upon the problem is inevitable, as I have drawn all the characters—the smug rich man and his wife who refuses to sacrifice her soul on the matrimonial altar; the slang-shouting, bullying evangelist and the diplomatic minister; pillars of the church and newspaper men—from men and women that I know—and whose types you know—and I have tried to present faithfully their attitudes toward a phase of life.

Immortalizing Mary Magdalene and bringing her down through the centuries to work for women branded with the scarlet letter seemed a connecting link between the scriptural episode and what I knew of the events of the "clean-up crusade" in Cleveland when the segregated district was abolished and the inmates driven out to fare as best they might. I have presented her as a Woman of the Town, suppressing the supernatural aspect of her character until the climax. Forbes Robertson's portrayal of "The Third Floor Back" kept recurring to me as I developed her part.

I'm not more familiar than the average layman with the Bible. I'll confess I hunted long and diligently for the Magdalene story. St. John tells it in a few lines: "And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst."

"They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act."

"Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?"

put the scene into the big dramatic situation of the last act, when the Woman of the Town, saved from the mob by the rich man whose convictions she has swept away, drops into the posture of Henner's famous "Kneeling Magdalene," and speaks:

"I am the eternal Magdalene. Made immortal by the touch of His hand, two thousand years ago. When those that would have stoned me turned sullenly away he raised me up, saying, 'Woman, I appoint thee my messenger. Go thou down the centuries and bear witness to this that thou hast seen. In every clime and in every season thou wilt find those who have sinned as thou hast sinned. Stand between them and their persecutors as I have stood between thee and thine. And upbraid them not, for are they not children of the same Father? There are those of my disciples who shall preach of many things, but to you I entrust this text. Let him who is without sin among you first cast a stone at her.' And he departed and I stood as one transfixed, gazing after him. And my brow burned from his touch and through my veins coursed blood that had been cleansed as by fire."

When the play opens it is night in the study of Elijah Bradshaw, the rich man, who has financed a whirlwind clean-up campaign conducted by Billy Dayson, an evangelist of the hell-raising sort. Bradshaw is an American business man of the captain of industry type, firm, forceful, self-made, impatient of failure. He hates sin in the same way that he hates any other form of inefficiency. He is reading to Rev. Birmingham Smollet, "modern" clergyman, a statement prepared for the newspapers.

Bradshaw—I have written briefly, but to the point. (Reads from his report.) "As chairman of the citizens' committee, I desire now to congratulate the people of this community on the great victory they have won over the hosts of Satan. The elimination of the segregated vice district at midnight will crown with success a crusade that we have waged for months, prayerfully and with God's help, potently. At the stroke of twelve tonight, the doors of these dens of depravity will close forever and their shameless inmates will no longer menace the youth of our fair city."

Smollet—Amen!

Bradshaw (continues reading)—"As head of the committee I have been subjected to much criticism by certain sentimentalists who profess to believe that these women have certain rights . . . I am disturbed by no such convictions . . . When a leper comes into our midst the law does not inquire how he came to be a leper, but it says 'Banish him instantly.' So say I of moral lepers. I believe in giving sin no quarter; in holding no parley with evil doers. . . . I take this occasion to thank the mayor



Mary Magdalene of the Tomb  
Painting by Henner.



Christ and the Adulterous Woman—by A.A. Anderson.

"This they said tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not."

"So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.'"

"And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground."

"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."

"When Jesus had lifted up himself and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, 'Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?'"

"She said, 'No man, Lord.' And Jesus said unto her, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.'—St. John viii, 3-11.

I amended the biblical text a bit and

and members of the committee who, to a man, gave their best efforts to this cause . . .

"In spite of the silly sentimentality that prevails in certain quarters, these women who ply their unspeakable trade must be shown no pity. They have forfeited all right to human sympathy. We have to deal with effects, not causes. And I seriously mistrust if any of these alleged causes may be substantiated in fact. Our misfortunes are all of our own making. Poverty is a disease bred by laziness; 'betrayed love' is a nickname for lust and 'predilection' is a cowardly excuse for hiding our own crimes behind the tombstones of our ancestors. And so we call upon the officials of this city to do their full duty. Not merely to close up these houses of infamy, but to see to it that their inmates, these women with the scarlet letters on their breasts, be banished forever from the community." (He raises his eyes and sees the woman standing before him.) Hello, who are you?

Woman of the Town—A woman.

By some occult power, the Woman of the Town convinces each man who looked into her eyes that she is a woman he had wronged. Bradshaw, torn by accusing conscience, believes her to be his illegitimate daughter and takes her into his home as a servant.

Bradshaw hangs to his role of self-righteousness. He refuses to allow Bellamy, a newspaper man, to marry his daughter, Elizabeth.

Bellamy—May I ask if you have any objections to me, personally?

Bradshaw—No, except that you're too smart for one thing.

Bellamy—Too smart? What do you mean—too smart?

Bradshaw—I've sized you up as one of those young fellows that think they know more than their fathers. I don't know where they get it. College, perhaps. They are chock full of skepticism, pessimism and amoralism. They poke fun at the churches and scoff at sacred things generally. I got an inkling of it when you

opened up on Dayson the other night. It struck me you had a lot of gall to talk the way you did.

Bellamy—You mean when I was interviewing him? I did lose my head a little, didn't I? But he got my goat telling how God calls him from one city to another. And we know—especially you ought to know—that he couldn't hear God calling him with a megaphone if they didn't show him the color of the coin.

Bradshaw—You've got the wrong slant, my boy.

Bellamy—What about Dayson's slant? And irreligious stuff, how's this excerpt from his sermon tonight—advance copy sent around by his press agent? He's telling the story of David and Goliath. Here's how he does it. (He reads): "Oh, little Dave soaked old Goliath on the coco between the lamps and he went down to the mat for the count. Dave took his sword and cut off the big fellow's block and the rest of the Philistine gang beat it."

Bradshaw—(smiling)—That's Dayson's style. He means it the right way.

Bellamy—I suppose you think my slant is wrong on the tenderloin question.

Bradshaw—Yes, I was shocked to think that a young man should defend anything so infamous.

Bellamy—I wasn't defending it . . . but if I was in the mayor's place and had it in my power to close those places, and I wanted to be on the square with my own conscience, I swear I don't know what I'd do.

Bradshaw—It is fortunate for this community you are not the mayor.

Bellamy—Maybe. Still, I don't know. I might get by. I took some good lessons once in mayoring.

Bradshaw—Lessons? Umph! From whom?

Bellamy—From old Sam Jones, in Toledo. You remember him.

They called him "Golden Rule Jones," because he operated on the do-unto-others-as-you-would-be-done-by plan. His police court was a court of rehabilitation. He found the good that is in every man and built on that.

Mrs. Martha Bradshaw, the kindly old-fashioned wife of the rich man, tells him and Rev. Mr. Smollet of a visit she has made to the vice district, finding to her great surprise that the women there are educated and human.

Martha—I do not consider that I am any better than the women of the underworld.

## Author of 'The Eternal Magdalene'

Robert H. McLaughlin, manager of the Colonial theater, Cleveland, has written several more or less successful plays. "The Fifth Commandment" was markedly a success and enjoyed a country-wide tour. "Demi-Tasse," a dramatic one-act piece, caused considerable comment.

"The Eternal Magdalene" will be produced the evening of August 30 by the Colonial Stock Company, Cleveland. Five New York producers have announced their intention of witnessing the premiere.



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only that I have been more fortunate than they in that circumstances have not at any time put me face to face with the necessity of earning my living in their way. Because I have been spared such an existence it seems to me now that I should deal gently with those of my sisters who have not been as fortunate as I.

Smollet—I am surprised to hear you talk so.

Later Blanche Dumond, keeper of a resort, calls on Mrs. Bradshaw in response to her invitation. Bradshaw, Smollet, and Judge Amos Bascomb, a reformer, are present. They boast of their success in cleaning up the city and she smilingly reminds them that the elemental things in human nature cannot be stamped out. Her profession is the oldest in the world, she says; old as the Bible, old as mythology. Were not the most beautiful girls of Greece—exponent of refinement—trained to all the arts of love and stationed in the Temple of Venus for the benefit of the learned and great? And at the end of their service were not those women the most sought after as wives by men who appreciated women versed in art, music, and knowledge of the ways of men? Who are the most illustrious women of history? Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Pompadour, Du Barry? She leaves them silent but unconvinced.

The Woman of the Town from her place

as servant in the Bradshaw household works complete regeneration in the rich man. There comes a time in the third act when Smollet, commissioned by Dayson and the citizens' committee, demands that Bradshaw turn her out. Bradshaw refuses. Smollet replies that Dayson and his followers will halt before his home on their way to the tabernacle.

Bradshaw—Don't spare me. You have said the Lord loveth whom he chasteneth. Pray therefore, that He may love me overmuch, but not more than human endurance can stand . . . Shall you be with those of our friends tonight? (Indicating the front of the house.)

Smollet—I shall be on the side of righteousness. . . . (Off stage sounds of music—band playing Brewer's Big Horns. Grows louder until in front of house.)

Otto, a servant. (entering excitedly) What is it? What is it?

Bradshaw—Pull those shades quickly—then turn out the lights. (Light increases outside as torchbearers come on the lawn.) Bring me my revolver from my cabinet. My friends are paying me a call.

Woman—I knew they would come. They have come for me, to stone me.

Bradshaw—They will not dare.

Dayson (voice off stage) My friends stop here awhile. This is the home of Elijah Bradshaw—

Crowd—Ahl